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15 May 1967

MEMORANDUM

Soviet Policy in the Middle East

Soviet Aims

1. It is clear from the scale and character of Soviet activities in the Middle East that Moscow has come to regard the area as one of priority interest. The growth of the Soviet presence, however, has been partly a response to forces operating within the region; it has not been all of Soviet design.

2. The opportunity offered by the Egyptian interest in Soviet arms in the mid-50s probably helped to precipitate the important shift that was then developing in Soviet policy. What was involved was a wholly new appraisal of the changes taking place in the Third World, developments that the Soviets had been slow to understand. They had just come to recognize that the tides of nationalism running in the Third World had a "revolutionary" potential, offering opportunities for the injection of Soviet influence.

3. The Soviets concluded that a policy of associating the bloc with the new governments and nationalist movements on a platform of "national liberation struggle" offered a way of increasing pressure on the Western powers. The Soviets assumed that the internal regimes in the newly independent states, in part because of their association with the bloc, would inevitably take on a more radical character. This would intensify their conflict with the Western powers, which in turn would mean denial to the latter of access to strategically critical areas and resources. The Soviet entry into the Middle East was thus a manifestation of a general policy concept intended to be applied to the whole of the Third World.

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4. Military considerations certainly figure in the Soviet desire to contest the Western position in the area, although these probably do not have much to do with planning for the contingency of general war. No doubt the Soviets would like to deny the area to use by US strategic forces. Propaganda pressures against their presence are mounted from time to time. But the Soviets must realize that there is no prospect of effecting such denial by political means for a long time to come, if ever. Political harassment will be the most they will be capable of.

5. The Soviets probably do not have in mind the acquisition of military positions or assets of their own which could be significant in connection with a general war. Such assets would not enable them to strike more effectively at strategic targets critical to them than they can now. An attempt to acquire a capability for pre-emptive attack on US strike forces in the area would assume a vast air and antisubmarine warfare (ASW) effort that would have to be based in the area itself. Even if it were assumed that the Soviets were designing their forces under a doctrine of pre-emption, such a capability in the area seems likely to remain well beyond their means, both technical and political. Finally, the Soviet conception of the course a general war might take, if it came, does not seem to include extended land or sea campaigns in an area such as the Middle East.

6. The Soviets may be thinking of their possible involvement in limited conflicts in the region. In principle, the policy of attempting to displace Western influence could present such contingencies. Or local conflicts might occur in which the Soviets would wish to give support to clients of theirs at some fairly high level of risk short of actual intervention. Their present activities may point to an intention to operate in the Mediterranean in this way eventually.

7. If they wish to do so, the Soviets will have to acquire capabilities that they do not now possess. They lack limited war forces of a kind that could operate effectively in the area. They would need a changed statute for the Dardanelles and a cooperative regime in Turkey, neither of which seems possible for the foreseeable future.

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They would presumably want air and naval facilities at some points in the Mediterranean basin itself. Not only is it unlikely that even states friendly to the USSR would wish to make these available, but it would be extremely awkward politically for the Soviets to acquire them. To do so would compromise the "anti-imperialist" rationale on which Soviet policy operates and would have negative repercussions throughout the Third World.

8. Insofar as the Soviets have a military interest in the area, this seems likely for the foreseeable future to have two aspects. The first is to influence the political disposition of governments in such a way as to make the area as inhospitable as possible to military cooperation with the West, and in particular, to the deployment of US military power. The second is to establish relations with governments that make it possible to use them as proxies for actions directed against Western interests and against regimes unfriendly to the Soviet bloc. Military and economic aid and the USSR's political backing as a great power are the primary instruments of such a policy. The relationship developed with the UAR over the last dozen years probably indicates the pattern that the Soviets would like to develop generally in the area.

9. Thought of as an area in which and through which to pursue Soviet interests by proxy, the Middle East retains its historic character as a world crossroads. It gives access to Africa and has links with Asia. The radical nationalist movement has been strong there and its political leaders have been in the forefront of efforts to achieve united action against "Western colonialism and economic exploitation." The political climate is one in which the Soviet skills at forming fronts for subversive, political, and propaganda actions work to good effect. Thus the Soviets probably regard the region as not only of interest in itself but also as a useful base for support of their general strategy in the Third World.

10. The Soviets have surely given thought to ways in which they might turn the West's dependence on the region's oil supplies to their account. But at the present stage, aspirations to pre-empt or control oil output are not filled with much promise. The bloc states cannot provide a

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substitute market. To be in a position to manage the distribution of oil, and perhaps to deny it to the West, would assume a degree of Soviet control over producing countries that the USSR no longer exercises even in Eastern Europe. It seems certain that, whatever political forces hold power in these countries, they will continue to be extremely jealous of the disposal of these national assets. Probably the most the Soviets expect to be able to do is to encourage and exploit politically the chronic frictions between producing countries and Western oil interests. Their acquisition of some concessions and offers of technical assistance may in time give them a position in the industry that will facilitate this.

11. Soviet trade with the area has developed over the years, but has done so unevenly. On the whole, the Soviets will probably apply strictly economic criteria to this trade and will not want to or be able to use it as a means of political leverage. The interests of almost all countries of the area will continue to argue for maintaining extensive trading relationships with the West. The Soviets will see in the further development of trade, apart from economic advantage, mainly an opportunity to widen their presence and access.

12. In sum, the Soviets see the region as of prime strategic importance--politically, economically, militarily--in the long-term contest with the Western powers to which they are committed. Their primary aim for the foreseeable future will be, in the degree possible, to deny the area politically to the West, and in particular to the US. This emphasis flows from the nature of the means available to them. To the extent that states and political forces within the region can be induced to look to Moscow for political direction, the Western position will be increasingly constricted. The alignment of forces in this area with the bloc would work to Soviet advantage in the struggle for the Third World as a whole.

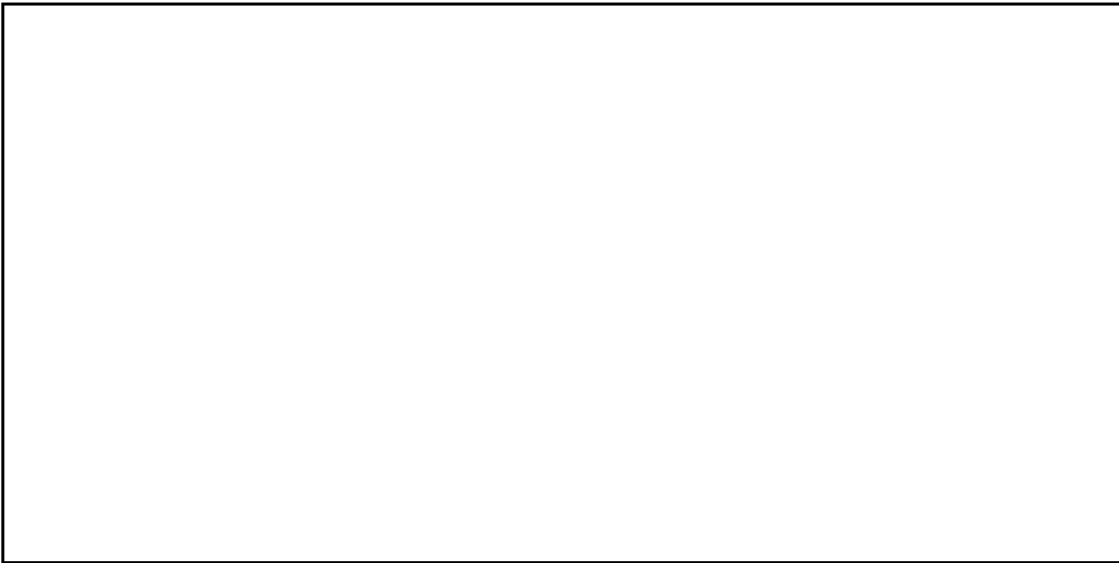
Soviet Economic, Political, and Military Activities

13. Since the Egyptian arms agreement in 1955, the USSR and the other bloc states have elaborated their ties

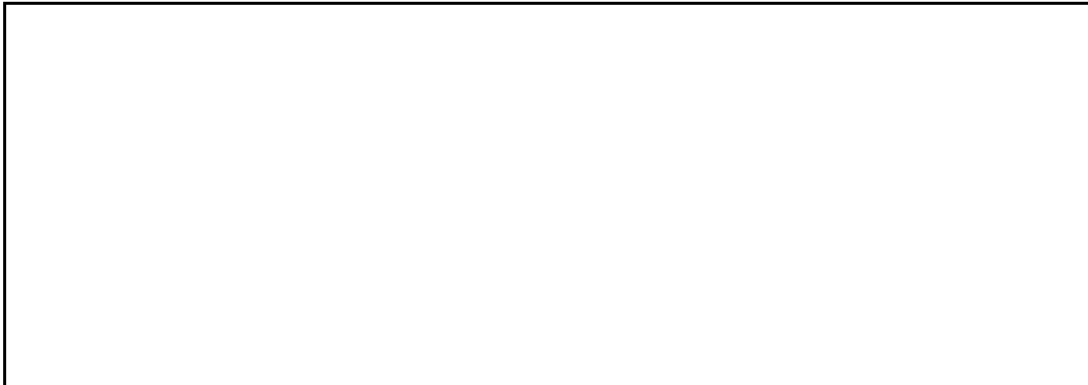
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with most of the countries in the Middle East. The main reliance has been on conventional instruments of influence--military and economic aid, trade, an active diplomacy including numerous exchanges of ceremonial visits, cooperation in the UN, and propaganda. Subversive techniques and intelligence operations are, of course, everywhere part of the modus operandi of Soviet policy, although in the Middle East they are now being applied primarily to advance the USSR's relations with local governments rather than to win power for Communist parties. (See annex for Soviet economic and military aid to the Middle East.)

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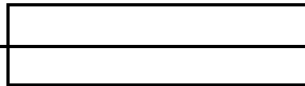
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MEMORANDUM FOR: Legislative Counsel

Attached for transmission to Senator Jackson is a background memorandum representing CIA views on Soviet aims and activities in the Middle East. The over-all classification is SECRET.

Any textual material drawn from the memorandum must be re-phrased or paraphrased for public use. The precise numbers of Soviet vessels in the Mediterranean may not be used, nor may the statement (p. 10, para. 28) on the types of military equipment being furnished



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